

Word Order Variation in Germanic verb clusters – the Distinction between Functional and Lexical Verbs

Goals of this talk

I hope to relate several closely related Southern German dialects by ways of binary parameter settings. The syntactic variation I focus here is the ordering amongst verbal elements in the verbal complex. Data will be drawn from several German dialects (e.g. Swabian, Alemanic, Basel German, Zürich German and Viennese) during a recent fieldwork study. I show that the distinction between functional (auxiliaries and modals) and main verbs is a crucial one in these dialects. Furthermore, the status of perception verbs, i.e. whether they are functional or lexical, is also subject to parametric variation. Word order possibilities in the verbal complex hinge crucially on the distinction between these two classes of verbs.

Data

Brief definition of IPP (infinitivus pro participio)

The modal surfaces as an infinitive instead of a participle.

- (1) Ich habe es gekonnt.
I have it can (past participle)
'I was able to do it.'
- (2) Ich hätte es Dir geben können. (IPP)
I had it you give can (infinitive)
'I would have been able to give it to you.'
*Ich hätte es Dir geben gekonnt.

Distinct word order: Standard German 1-3-2 in embedded IPP and 3-2-1 in embedded non-IPP (see (3) and (4) below)

(All possible word order variants are transcribed in Standard German for ease of comparison.)

(3) **IPP in dependent clauses: V_1 : auxiliary, V_2 : modal, V_3 : main**

- a. Wer weiß, ob sie die Prüfung hätte bestehen können. (1-3-2: Standard German)
who knows if she the exam had pass can
'Who knows whether she had been able to pass the exam.'
- b. Wer weiß, ob sie die Prüfung bestehen hätte können. (3-1-2)
- c. Wer weiß, ob sie die Prüfung bestehen können hätte. (3-2-1)
- d. Wer weiß, ob sie die Prüfung hätte können bestehen. (1-2-3)
- e. *Wer weiß, ob sie die Prüfung können hätte bestehen. (*2-1-3)
- f. *Wer weiß, ob sie die Prüfung können bestehen hätte. (*2-3-1)

(4) **Non-IPP (verb-final sentences): V_1 & V_2 : modals, V_3 : main**

- a. daß sie das Buch lesen können möchte. (3-2-1: Standard German)
that she the book read can would like
'that she would like to be able to read the book.'
- b. daß sie das Buch möchte können lesen. (1-2-3)
- c. daß sie das Buch möchte lesen können. (1-3-2)
- d. daß sie das Buch lesen möchte können. (3-1-2)
- e. *daß sie das Buch können möchte lesen. (*2-1-3)
- f. *daß sie das Buch können lesen möchte. (*2-3-1)

Proposal

Adopting Kayne 1994 and Chomsky 1995, I assume that all projections in German are head-initial and movements are triggered by the need to eliminate uninterpretable morphosyntactic features on the target. In addition, I posit a feature F that is uninterpretable and strong on functional verbs but interpretable on main verbs. For the purpose of this talk, I leave the exact specification of this feature open, but merely provide some

speculations about what this feature can be (e.g. theta-role assigning feature, or selectional property feature). By postulating this feature F, the four existing word order variants, i.e. 1-2-3, 1-3-2, 3-1-2 and 3-2-1, can be derived easily through head-to-head adjunction. 1-2-3 is the surface word order when no overt verb movement has taken place. 1-3-2 is derived when V₂ has the uninterpretable feature F and hence triggers V₃, which bears a matching interpretable F, to move. 3-1-2 is derived when V₁ has the feature F (this apparent violation of the Head Movement Constraint (Travis 1984) suggests that the main verb V₃ has something that the functional verb V₂ does not have, thus allowing V₃ to skip over V₂). 3-2-1 is derived when V₁ and V₂ both have the feature F and the main verb V₃ first moves to left-adjoin to V₂, and subsequently taking the whole adjoined structure to move further to the left of V₁. This derivation suggests that for the functional verb V₂ to move at all, it has to take the main verb V₃ along with it, lending further support for the distinction between these two classes of verbs. In addition, the fact that V₃ can move up twice follows from the assumption that the feature F on V₃ is interpretable and does not delete after checking. The crucial distinction between functional and lexical verbs enables us to correctly rule out 2-1-3. In addition, as I claim that verb projection raising within the verbal complex is not available in the dialects under investigation, 2-3-1 is also ruled out.

Another piece of evidence favoring this functional/lexical distinction comes from the status of perception verbs, which behave more like functional verbs in that they take bare infinitives as their complement and they cannot be passivized. If they are functional verbs, the analysis I am proposing would predict that 2-1-3 is not a possible word order variant when V₂ is a perception verb. This is indeed the case in Standard German and in most other German dialects. Surprisingly, however, in some Swiss German dialects, perception verbs can be passivized and if one can take this to mean that perception verbs behave in this respect more like main verbs, one would expect 2-1-3 to be possible in these dialects and this is indeed what the fieldwork has revealed.

(5) ,as si dr jung Maa d Täsche gsee hätt stäle (2-1-3)
 that she the young man the bag see has steal
 ‘that she saw the young man steal the bag.’

Finally, I propose four parameters that help us explain why certain word order variants are not possible in certain dialects.

Parameter 1: the IPP parameter (whether there is IPP in a particular grammar)

Parameter 1’: **aspectual auxiliaries in IPP can have the feature F** (whether 3-1-2 is possible)

Parameter 2: **functional verbs in non-IPP are obligatorily specified with the feature F** (whether 3-2-1 is the only possible order in non-IPP)

Parameter 3: **perception verbs are functional verbs** (whether 2-1-3 is possible)

	IPP	non-IPP	Parameter 1	1’	2	3
Grammar 1: Standard German 1	1-3-2	3-2-1	+	-	+	+
Grammar 2: Standard German 2 /Swabian	1-3-2, 3-1-2	3-2-1	+	+	+	+
Grammar 3: Viennese	N/A	3-2-1	-	N/A	+	+
Grammar 4: Alemannic /Swiss German 1	N/A	3-2-1, 1-2-3	-	N/A	-	+
Grammar 5: Alemannic/Swiss German 2	N/A	3-2-1, 1-2-3, 3-1-2, 1-3-2	-	N/A	-	+
Grammar 6: Swiss German 3	N/A	3-2-1, 1-2-3, 3-1-2, 1-3-2, (2-1-3)	-	N/A	-	-

(word order in italics are influences from Standard German)

Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that the distinction between functional verbs and main verbs is a crucial one. The feature F was proposed to capture this distinction in terms of which verbs trigger movement and which verbs undergo movement. The word order variation in several Southern German dialects follows from different parameter settings of four parameters. In doing so, I have related these grammars optimally, i.e. in terms of binary parameter settings. I hope to extend this analysis to other Germanic languages in future work.

References

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